

21. Ritual Action

16220 - Cosmology Matters - Meat and the Hadza epeme night dance ritual

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Skaanes, Thea (Moesgaard Museum, Højbjerg, Denmark / Dänemark)

The East African Hadza have been used as a reference for posing a human example of minimal cosmological orientation. Many studies with the Hadza have given the impression that Hadza are lacking in ritual and cosmological complexity due to a lack of evidence (cf. Woodburn 1982a, 1982b, Barnard and Woodburn 1988, Marlowe 2010). With Woodburn's finding that the Hadza have no belief in an afterlife (Woodburn 1982b) there has been little new research on Hadza ritual and cosmology.

This paper explores the practices at monthly night dances called epeme and examines from these rituals the implications for cosmological beliefs. The paper focuses on the dance ritual: the paraphernalia (both present and absent), the structured space, and the human and animal spiritual presence the ritual invokes.

Epeme is characterized by polysemy as it is used to denote the group of initiated men, the special meat reserved for the epeme men which is surrounded with harsh taboos and severe restrictions, and as a denominator for the night dances invoking spirits under a moonless sky. It seems to have both characteristics of a noun, an adjective, and a verb. When I asked three very senior epeme men what epeme was, the answer I received was surprising in its singularity: meat (manako), epeme is meat.

The paper traces the carnal aspects in this ritual and how it elucidates traces and fragments of cosmology. The presentation includes exploration of the material power objects, i.e. the objects connected to the epeme dance, especially the three "children" (Woodburn 1970) in the form of a gourd, a stick and a doll; the fleshness of the taboos; the carnal men performing the dance, and the meaty spirits it invokes.

The paper includes audio-clips, pictures, and display of physical objects.

References:

Barnard, A. and J. Woodburn (1988), Property, power and ideology in hunter-gathering societies: an introduction, in: Ingold, Riches and Woodburn (eds.), *Hunters and Gatherers*, vol. 2: Property, Power and Ideology, Oxford, Washington D.C.: Berg Publishers

Marlowe, F. (2010), *The Hadza. Hunter-gatherers of Tanzania*, University of California Press

Woodburn, J. (1970), *Hunters and Gatherers. The material culture of the nomadic Hadza*, London: The British Museum

——— (1982a), *Egalitarian Societies*, *Man*, New Series, Vol. 17, No. 3. (Sep., 1982), pp. 431-451.

——— (1982b), Social dimensions of death in four African hunting and gathering society in:
Bloch and Parry (eds.): *Death and the Regeneration of Life*, Cambridge University Press

16149 - Gender and sexual symbolism in BaYaka ritual action

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Lewis, Jerome, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.*

Different forms of gender and sexual symbolism are common in ritual performances among Central African hunter-gatherers. This paper describes some key BaYaka ritual performances, such as the mythological penis of women's primordial group now symbolized by the swirling Ejengi spirit, to the explicit re-enactments of sexual performances staged by women-only groups during Ngoku, or the broader observation that the climactic ritual phase when forest spirits are called to commune with the camp has a sexual spatial symbolism.

This paper interprets the significance of this symbolism to argue that ritual in egalitarian hunter-gatherer societies focuses on the tensions and power relations between the sexes rather than between generations, status groups or social classes. Structural equivalences between women and prey animals, between the blood of the hunt and the blood of menstruation, between sexual penetration and archetypal piercing by spear or arrow by men in hunting are recurring themes. The symbolic heart of Central African hunter-gatherer ritual focuses on men bringing non-human life (forest spirits) into the group, as they do meat, so that women's song and dance 'cooks' the spirit to produce euphoric (esengo)states among participants.

Among immediate-return hunter-gatherer societies in Central Africa, ritual *communitas* is not achieved by dissolving hierarchy and levelling participants in a liminal ritual space as is common in hierarchical societies the world over (Bloch, Turner). Rather, here liminal spaces created during initiations do not concern equality or inequality, status or changes in status, but rather gender and the playful opposition between men's and women's groups that is central to social organisation. This centrality of gender relations to internal politics, explains why gender, rather than status, are the primary concern of ritual, and liminal spaces are gender exclusive ones.

16103 - SOME THOUGHTS ON HADZA RELIGION AND RITUAL BEHAVIOUR

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Woodburn, James (Retired (London School of Economics), Cambridge, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)*

In this paper I intend to consider some of the social implications of traditional Hadza religion and ritual. My aim is to illuminate how Hadza culture and society operate and to bring out similar patternings in other hunter-gatherer societies with immediate-return economies.

15886 - The ritual construction, use and efficacy of the sihap-talisman among the Eastern Penan, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Rothstein, Mikael (University of Southern Denmark (SDU), Odense M, Denmark / Denmark)

Based on fieldwork data, as well as ethnographic literature, this presentation offers an in-depth analysis of amulets and talismans of the Eastern Penan, Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. These artefacts, sihap, are ritually designed, made and used in many different ways, and serve as valuable, and sometimes indispensable, elements in ritualized processes, hunting not least. Apart from showing how the efficacy of the sihap is created by means of micromythology, classification, storage, combination of materials etc., I shall argue that the sihap itself constitutes a kind of ritual, a "battery" that works like any other apotropaic ritual, but without or with only little manipulation. It works in itself, and automatically implies, or relates to, other ritual spheres. Furthermore, my presentation will discuss the social and political implications of sihap exchange and trade, and show how the otherwise non-ritualized Penan in fact may be perceived as extraordinarily ritualistic.

15858 - Ritual, sharing and honey collecting among the Maniq

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Kricheff, Daniel (University College London, London, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)

The Maniq people of Southern Thailand are one of the least studied groups of hunter-gatherers in the Malay peninsula. This paper will present recent findings from field work among the Maniq, focusing specifically on the dynamic relationship between ritual and economic and political practices. Ritual among the Maniq is highly decentralised, and often performed in an ad hoc, personalised manner. The paper will consider the ways in which Maniq cosmological conceptions and ritual performance are closely related to conceptions of proper social and political behaviour. It will consider how everyday actions such as sharing practices, foraging technology and the avoidance of felling large trees are placed at the centre of Maniq cosmology. It will also consider how these very actions - especially sharing and redistributing food and other desired objects between individuals within the camp - become incorporated into ritual actions associated with the seasonal collection of honey.

15802 - Innovation in Mbendjele women's Ngoku rituals

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): *Oloa Biloa, Camille (University College London, London, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)*

The Mbendjele of Northern Congo Brazzaville are very creative when it comes to men and women's rituals. Young people are often encouraged by the elders to catch or purchase new spirits in order to perform new rituals, and each village has a slightly different version of each spirit ritual they practice. Despite an incredible resilience of ancient spirit rituals such as Edjengi, Bolobé or Ngoku, during my fieldwork (November 2012-June 2014) I observed great differences in the way these rituals are performed from one community to the other. As rituals are re-invented each time they are performed by different individuals in different places, rituals are in constant evolution. At the heart of Mbendjele culture, spirit performances are at the same time a reaffirmation of a long tradition as well as a way for individuals to express themselves in a unique way that allows them to differentiate from one another. New songs, dances and settings are constantly introduced in the performance of Ngoku rituals, and I will show that this constant evolution is part of the ritual itself.

In this paper I will focus on Ngoku, one of the most widely spread and practiced women's rituals in Mbendjele society. I'll show that despite a common symbolic and religious meaning, innovation in the way the performance is held can have a great impact on the ritual itself. I will focus on the way the Mbendjele from the village of Bonguinda (Likouala region) transformed this ancient ritual through innovation processes to make it their own in a very specific way. Through this case study, I aim to analyse the way aspects of a performance can be reinvented without changing the ritual structure itself.

17433 - 'Living with selves beyond-the-human: ||Khao-a Dama perspectives on agency in Hurubes, west Namibia'

Presentation type: Oral presentation

Author(s): Sullivan, Sian (Bath Spa University School of Society, Enterprise & Environment, Bath, Un. Kingdom / Ver Königr.)

Damara / #Nū Khoen are a KhoeSan pastoral-hunting-foraging people who in historical times inhabited Namibia from the !Kuseb to the Hoarusib Rivers in the west, to the Otavi Mountains in the east. This paper draws on oral history and on-site ethnography over a twenty year period with ||Khao-a Dama associated with a land area of west Namibia known as Hurubes. Through recovering childhood memories of ways of living in places from which people were cleared to create a wildlife zone, combined with reflection on extant practices, the paper explores some key aspects of living with multiple selves-beyond-the-human in this context (cf. Kohn 2013; also Descola 2013). Ritual actions relating to ancestors (such as the greeting and offering practice of tse-khom), understandings of the agency of different animal species, and reflection on the agency of the supernatural being associated with rain (!Nanus) in calling forth healers, will be considered as examples of how nonhuman others have been conceptualised, experienced and lived with by ||Khao-a Dama. These practices and actions are interpreted as routes through which ontological aspects of a 'traditional' ||Khao-a Dama worldview might be approached, with implications for what it has meant to live successfully with a depth (Abram 2010) and diversity of agential beings, only some of whom are human.

Abram, D. 2010 *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Descola, P. 2013 *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kohn, E. 2013 *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.